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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the future of geography education at the college and graduate levels. The rapid changes in the world, the financial pressures at home, and a decrease in the recognition of the potential contributions of geography and geographers are signals of danger, but also opportunities for growth. If geographic education is to be of value, it must prepare students to deal with the geographic dimension of world-wide issues and problems. These issues include natural resource management, environmental protection, third-world development, political fragmentation, and demographic change. Geographic education programs must be redesigned to reflect an awareness of these issues and to provide students with the skills and perspective necessary to deal effectively with them. The author then discusses the implications for geographic education, in particular service and general education, undergraduate major programs, and graduate programs. Implications for service and general education include the following. Geography must provide courses which expose the general education student to basic geographic knowledge. Other programs--business, environmental studies, urban studies--must be encouraged to explicitly recognize the geographic component. Geography courses must be redesigned to make the importance of a geographic perspective more explicit and relevant to students and to deal with emerging issues. In undergraduate major programs, students should be exposed to eight components: geographic perspective; quantitative methods; cartography; geographic research; a physical and a social science systematic approach to geographic research; an analytic and integrative course on a geographical region; moderate exposure to other disciplines; and an exploratory, speculation, and intellectual examination of a significant issue. On the graduate level, programs must be expanded and their applied content strengthened. Also, geographers and geography departments must do more to identify and open up new career opportunities in the private sector and in government. (Author/RM)

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LOOKING TOWARD THE 21ST CENTURY: IMPLICATIONS FOR "TRADITIONAL: UNDERGRADUATE/GRADUATE GEOGRAPHY PROGRAMS

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LOOKING TOWARD THE 21ST CENTURY: IMPLICATIONS FOR "TRADITIONAL" UNDERGRADUATE/GRADUATE GEOGRAPHY PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Several forces are coalescing which make it extremely important that geography and geographers re-evaluate current educational strategy. The rapid changes which characterize our world, the increased pressures (financial and political) on our schools, the increased complexity of our society, and the increased vulnerability of our discipline to academic cutbacks are combining to push our discipline toward a crisis. The recent developments at the University of Michigan are but one sign of this crisis.

Another, subtler indication was found at the N.C.G.E. convention in Des Moines last October. One speaker, Mr. James Risser, spoke about the problems of soil erosion. Risser (perhaps, the most knowledgeable of the national reporters concerned with this problem) has studied the problem intensely and has won a Pulitzer Prize for his series on the topic. Yet Mr. Risser was unaware of the role of geography and the work of geographers in understanding this important problem. If this was a rare occurrence, we could place the responsibility for that ignorance on him, but that is not the case. The fact that all geographers know of similar cases suggest that the problem may lay in our own performance.

Geography has failed to sufficiently inform and educate the members of our society about the value (and importance) of a geographic perspective

on many problems. We have failed to communicate our knowledge and understanding to a broad segment of our society. This paper is concerned with one aspect of that problem--the role of formal geographic education at the college and university level.

The pressures on geography programs caused by declining enrollments and fiscal retrenchment must also be met by imaginative changes. Geography must become more responsive to these pressures and the educational needs generated by our changing society. The phrase, "Grow or Die" does not mean to expand in size as much as to improve in effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness. This is the requirement facing our discipline if we are to survive and contribute significantly to society.

DIMENSIONS OF GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

Throughout academia, departments of geography have three principal roles. Geography provides service to other departments and to general education. Geography provides training and in-depth education to undergraduates who major or minor in the discipline. Lastly, geography provides intensive graduate level education.

Within these roles we find a conflict emerging between two views of geographic education: the generalist view and the specialist view. On one level are geographers who seem to decry the move towards vocational training, the development of specialized skills, and the narrow training in specific subareas of geography. These geographers feel that the loss of the general perspective robs geography of its unique perspective. The specialists, on the other hand, seem to argue that generalists are "jacks of all trades and masters of none" and perceive a superficiality in the

generalist approach. They also seem to argue that it is necessary to be more responsive to market forces and that this indicates the need for specialists.

Proponents of these two views see them as incompatible, however this need not, in fact must not, be so. Both our general and our specific understanding will be enhanced if our educational programs incorporate and integrate both the general and the specifc. Geography's greatest potential contribution lies in its integrative capabilities, and this requires a general knowledge, a generalist perspective, and detailed specialized training.

The false dichotomy of generalist vs. specialist is but one of a series of false dichotomies which seem to characterize contemporary geographic debate. Graduate vs. undergraduate education, physical vs. human geography, regional vs. systematic geography, and scientivic vs. humanistic approaches are examples of others. If geography is to survive and thrive in our institutions of higher education there must be a dialogue across these poles and our programs must not reflect these unnecessary divisions. We must redefine the elements and the whole of geographic education.

EMERGING ISSUES AND GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

All education, by its very nature, is future oriented. Its purpose, value, and application are situated in the future. To understand and anticipate the needs for education, in general, and geographic education, specifically, we must look to the future. One way to approach this is to try to identify issues and problems which we can expect to be important

for the future. Some of these issues are perennial, while others are not. Most, if not all, of these issues have a distinctive and important geographic dimension. If geographic education is to be of value it must prepare us and our students to deal with that dimension of these problems. In what follows I want to suggest five issues of substantial importance for the future which have significant implications for geographic education.

1. Resource Management. The first issue is concerned with the use, allocation, conservation, and exploitation of our "natural" resources. This broad issue includes such resources as fossil fuels sources, wood, minerals, land, water, air, and non-mineral resources. To deal with this very complex and complicated issue we must educate our society to consider the economic, social, political, environmental, and ethical aspects. All of these include a geographic dimension.
2. Environmental Protection. The necessity of preventing further degradation to our environment seems clear. The wide range of risks generated by a decline in environmental quality include our very ability to maintain our species in a civilized condition. Our society must be able to understand the importance of an adequate environmental quality for the soul as well as for the body. The trade offs between economic growth and environmental disruption must be better understood. The long term costs of environmental decay must be incorporated into our decision making. The geographic dimension is fundamental if this issue is to be understood.

3. Third World Development. This broad issue may be the most potentially explosive over the next few decades. This issue is clearly related to the issues referred to above. If our society is to react constructively to the international issues raised by the demand for development and a general improvement in the quality of life throughout the third world we must be better informed and educated about the third world: its range of cultures and attitudes, the issues of development, and our own entanglement in the complex global system. This too requires geographic education.

4. Political Fragmentation. Within our nation, many others, and on a global scale we can expect a continued rise in the degree of political fragmentation. Separatist movements, attempts to solidify local jurisdictional boundaries, the increased identification of people with narrow political ideologies and perspectives will continue to change the context in which political action occurs. This context is made even more difficult by the convergence of power and the probable rise of new power centers around the world and within each continent.

5. Demographic Change. The demographic structure for the next 50 years is already substantially determined throughout most of the third world. Only catastrophe can alter the implications of the existing population pyramids of nations like Mexico, India, and Indonesia. In the United States and other developed nations the aging of the population which is already in evidence will also lead to some fundamental social changes. Clearly these pressures

are related to the other issues raised above.

All of these issues are, at least partly, geographic. The necessity to understand the geographic aspects is clear to geographers, but not always to others. We must redesign our geographic education programs to reflect an awareness of these issues and to provide our students with the skills, understanding, and perspective so that they will be aware of the importance of geography if we are to deal effectively with them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

The emerging issues raised above, the financial problems all universities are facing, and the apparent increase in geographic ignorance throughout our society indicate that the discipline faces quite a task. To discuss some of these implications it is useful to divide this section into three segments: service and general education, undergraduate major programs, and graduate programs.

Service and General Education. It seems clear that geographers must work to expand the role their discipline plays in other programs and in general education. There are four primary implications of the foregoing discussions for this component of geographic education.

1. Geography must provide courses which expose the general education student to "basic geographic knowledge."
2. Other programs must be encouraged to explicitly recognize the geographic component (i.e., in business, environmental studies, urban studies, etc.).
3. Geography courses must be designed to make the importance of a

geographic perspective more explicit and relevant to most, if not all, students.

4. The geographic component of general education must expand its efforts to deal with emerging issues.

These implications will involve geographers in greater interaction with other elements of the academic world, necessitate more "public relations" and require that the "service" courses be redesigned. None of this is easy, but in many schools it is crucial.

One other possibility should be investigated by geographers. It seems clear that general education must become more concerned with the need for integrating the disciplines and providing more holistic approaches to understanding our world. Geography provides one perspective from which both integrative and holistic education can emerge. Geographers should consider the possibility of working to develop this dimension and to have it incorporated in the general education system of their schools.

Undergraduate Major Programs. There are three principal reasons for students choosing to major in geography as an undergraduate: (1) to prepare for graduate work in geography or related fields; (2) to prepare for specific types of jobs or careers; or (3) general interest in the subject matter. Although each of these reasons result in different selections of the courses from the geography department, the differences do not have to be as great as it sometimes seems. The needs of all of these students contain some similar elements and a department's responsibility is to exercise the leadership necessary to see that they are present. Each student should be exposed to eight components through an

undergraduate program.

1. A geographic perspective, integrating a variety of phenomena in a spatial context.
2. Quantitative methods in order to have a basic understanding of statistical, mathematical, and numerical methods available for geographic analysis.
3. Cartography--both design and interpretation.
4. Geographic research to gain the experience of defining problems, doing field and library research, interpreting evidence, and drawing conclusions.
5. A physical and a social science systematic approach to geographic research.
6. An analytic and integrative course on a geographical region.
7. Some moderate exposure to a variety of other disciplines (economics, sociology, biology, geology, political science, etc.).
8. An exploratory, speculation and intellectual examination of a significant issue which requires interaction with fellow students, use of concepts and ideas from other disciplines, and integrating of approaches and knowledge from a variety of the systematic areas of geography.

The undergraduate major program should aim for breadth but also should include some depth. It should encourage students to permeate the boundaries which separate different disciplines, and divide individual disciplines. It should include the "basic skills," but also the more fundamental skills of learning how to learn, how to ask, and how to examine. Such a program should also expose the students to different

cultures, to different paradigms, and to different philosophies. The job market should not be sacrificed at the altar of intellectual idealism, but the importance of intellect cannot be denied the would be practitioner. Students must be prepared both for the short term needs and for long term development. Theory and practice cannot be seen as opposites, but as two aspects in a symbiotic relationship. This attitude must be present in our programs and our faculty if it is to be communicated to our students.

Graduate Programs. For the most part graduate programs in geography have been concerned with preparing future academic geographers. Recently there has been an increased interest in preparing masters and doctoral candidates for the "applied" world. This will be increasingly necessary unless we prefer the alternatives of reducing our graduate programs. The reasons for this are found in a recent essay by Donald Deskins ("Comments on Geography, Change and the Future," Geographical Perspectives, Vol. #47, pp. 1-5, 1980). The most important implications of this new reality are:

1. Graduate programs must expand and strengthen their applied content; and
2. Geographers and geography departments must do more to identify and open up new career opportunities in the private sector and in government (outside of universities).

The A.A.G. is actively involved in the second of these tasks, but much more needs to be done. Every geographer has a responsibility of "selling" geography. The first of these implications is sure to meet resistance. I am not suggesting that the broad character of geography be dropped, it will be even more important as the applied element is strengthened. It does mean that we must seek the advice of professional geographers who

are already in the non academic world. It does mean that we must allow more applied courses and dissertations and redefine our requirements so that they do not exclude valid and important topics of an applied nature. In other words, we must open our minds and recognize that quality geography does not have to be restricted, but can be an important dimension in "practical" problem-solving.

Our graduate programs must be re-examined and, where necessary, redesigned to meet a wide variety of new demands. This includes the possibility of joint degree programs with other disciplines (business, anthropology, economics, planning, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS

Geography as an organized discipline is rapidly approaching a crisis which will determine its health for several decades. The rapid changes in the world, the financial pressures at home and a decrease in the recognition of the potential contributions of geography and geographers are signals of danger, but also opportunities for growth. To reduce the danger and take advantage of the opportunity, academic geography must show more foresight than it has in the past. This foresight must be reflected in our research and in our educational programs. We must become more future oriented, develop our integrating potential, and blend theory and practice. We must reflect these attitudes in our courses, programs and in our classroom behaviors. This will not be easy. It will mean we will have to open our minds, re-evaluate our objectives. The brass ring is there, we have but to reach for it.